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ABSTRACT

Noting inadequacies in previous conceptualizations of gender, a study analyzed students' descriptions of persons they identify as masculine or feminine and of situations in which these persons and the students themselves seem more or less feminine or masculine. Subjects, 83 male and 100 female undergraduate students in communication or psychology courses at a Mid-Atlantic suburban university or a liberal arts college in a small midwestern town, offered up to eight characteristics of the most feminine and the most masculine person they knew, whether that person ever seemed more or less feminine or more or less masculine, and rated themselves using the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Respondents identified gender as characteristics of persons, but also understood it as something that varied according to interaction partners and focus of activities. Responses show differences in how femininity and masculinity are constructed and in what situations influence gender perceptions. Findings suggest the need for a reconceptualization of gender to recognize its variation by situation and time as well as other factors such as race and class. Findings also suggest that understanding how gender actually operates in human interaction requires a more complex analysis than has occurred to date. (Contains 31 references and 2 tables of data. An appendix defines some of the categories in the tables.) (RS)

Gender Diversity: Conceptions of A Changeable Variable

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Abstract

We summarize inadequacies in previous conceptualizations of gender and argue for reconceptualization based on context as well as individual characteristics. Even feminist scholars who recognize gender variance by race, class and other factors still discuss gender as if it were a stable characteristic of individuals. We report an analysis of students' descriptions of persons they identify as masculine or feminine (our operationalization of gender) and of situations in which these persons and they themselves seem more or less feminine or masculine. Respondents identify gender as characteristics of persons, but also understand it as something that varies according to one's interaction partner(s) and focus of activities. Responses show differences in how femininity and masculinity are construed and in what situations influence gender perceptions. We call for a reconceptualization of gender to recognize its variation by situation and time as well as other factors such as race and class.

Q: Are there situations you feel feminine?

A: "Crying. (Shit! I believe that men should cry, yet I feel feminine when I do. Well, maybe not feminine, maybe just not masculine. Yeah, that's it. I think.)"

This paper fits the 1994 ICA convention theme by raising questions of gender diversity. Mainstream communication scholarship, like much feminist scholarship, has correctly identifying the differences between women and men, but failed to reflect the diversity among women (hooks, 1984; Spelman, 1988; Stanback, 1988; among many others). We argue that diversity among genders themselves has not been recognized and intend this paper to contribute to the growing awareness that genders are quite diverse.

One result of the developing sensitivity to diversity within populations has been analysis, even emphasis, on how women differ from men. Scholars have increasingly written about their findings as gender differences, to reflect awareness that most differences between women and men have social and cultural rather than biological origins.

As a result, most scholars now agree that the term, gender, should not be used to refer to a person's sex, since the word properly refers to a more complex concept. Little agreement or clarity, however, exists as to what the word denotes. In some cases gender is used to refer to a general set of cultural ideas about appropriate behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, roles and positions for persons seen to be either male or female. In other cases, the term describes social and positional differences between women and men. When so used, the word gender is rarely

problematic because users ordinarily have similar referents in mind when they speak of or hear gender spoken of in these senses. In other cases, however, gender is taken to identify characteristics of individual persons. Most such identification is used in the context of discussing or measuring differences between men and women. Hence, vast literatures focusing on "gender" differences have developed when what they primarily reflect are average differences between groups of women and men, differences that on the whole are relatively small and practically insignificant.

We have previously argued that this practice confounds gender effects with biological effects and limits understandings of gender variation, especially variation within populations of men and women (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, 1994; Taylor, 1991). Scholars and laypeople alike recognize that women vary markedly from each other in their internalization or demonstration of gender expectations, as do men. Yet, regardless of the sex-typing individuals exhibit, scholars and laypeople alike dichotomize "the genders" by sex.

For the layperson, such dichotomous classification might be useful and only rarely problematic. For the scholar, however, such confounding of sex and gender perpetuates rather than corrects confusion over the location of gender and obscures its variation across people. Too little research yet reflects gender as Ferree and Hess (1987) identified it: as "relational rather than essential, structural rather than individual . . . a property of systems rather than people" (p. 17). Too many

scholars who recognize that gender has cultural sources, or even is a systemic property, still do research and write as if gender were a property of individuals.

We think it is accurate to conclude that one's gender is not a fixed quality, but varies according to situation and time as well as perceptions of those one is communicating with, perceptions that include but aren't limited to attributions of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. If we are correct, this conception of diversity illuminates a new level of complexity.

PRIOR RESEARCH

The Relationship between Sex and Gender

The complexity of the relationship between sex and gender stems from the asymmetry of levels at which the concepts are analyzed. The term 'sex' is typically used to differentiate men and women at a single level, by biological criteria such as chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy, a simplistic dichotomy that may itself be problematic (Fausto-Sterling, 1985; Kessler & McKenna, 1978). Among scholars, the term 'gender' has been used at different levels of analysis, to characterize role allocation in institutions, interactions between people, and cognitions of individuals (Unger & Crawford, 1992). At the institutional level, gender legitimizes assignment of women and men to different spheres of endeavor, thereby limiting their access to related skills and knowledge (Eagly, 1987; Sherif, 1982). At the interactional level, gender is involved in negotiation of

relationships, including their intimacy and control (Deaux & Major, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987). At the individual level, gender is internalized through frequent performance of sex-appropriate behavior (Bohan, 1993). Sex is therefore related to the division of labor and power in society, to resources and responsibilities in relationships, and to a sense of maleness and femaleness in the individual, each by means of gender.

The relationships among sex and gender remain ambiguous, so much so that we don't have an English word that unfailingly denotes the idea of gender. Commonly used words are masculine and feminine, but these have various unclear referents. Sometimes the terms refer to whether a person is male or female; other times they are used to suggest what we have described above as gender. When so used, 'masculine' and 'feminine' may refer to a man's or woman's gender in a general sense. Other times they refer to a number that summarizes responses to masculinity and femininity scales. The terms have been used to describe degrees of sex-typing, gender role congruence, and gender identity acquisition. Yet the extent to which, if at all, people assimilate experiences of gendered positions and interactions to their gender identities, remains unclear. Heterogeneous findings on sex difference in social behavior can often be explained by diverse situational constraints (Eagly, 1987), but such constraints can create situated identities, if for example one is 'nurturant' or 'aggressive' in only certain situations.

The extent to which biological characteristics play a direct role in individuals' sense of masculinity and femininity is also

unclear. There may be a closer link between physical characteristics and ideas of gender than previous measurement tools have reflected (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Myers and Gonda (1982), for example, asked a large, heterogenous sample to define the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and found that references to physical appearance and being male or female were more frequent than were references to personality and behavior. In an undergraduate sample, however, references to personality and behavior increased, whereas references to physical appearance and being male or female decreased. Similar findings are those by Spence and Sawin (1985) and Beinstein Miller and Taylor (1993). Spence and Sawin asked married couples to state characteristics of masculine and feminine persons and the basis of masculinity and femininity in themselves. Physical characteristics were used most often to characterize other people, but work and family roles were mentioned most often for self. Over one-fifth of the respondents could not state the basis of their own masculinity and femininity. Taylor and Beinstein Miller found references to physical characteristics were the largest of five categories used to classify descriptions of masculine and feminine persons, constituting 40 percent of the entire set of descriptions.

In teaching and writing, many scholars use the term 'gender' rather than 'sex,' even when they measure characteristics or behaviors of women and men, because gender emphasizes cultural rather than biological origins of differences. The possibility of using 'sex difference' to describe biological difference and

'gender' to describe social difference risks a dangerous oversimplification, one recently debated in Psychological Science (Deaux, 1993; Gentile, 1993; Unger & Crawford, 1993). Such a description may obscure the extent to which difference is constructed but still viewed as essential. Still, since comparisons are usually made between men and women, not between differentially gendered individuals, differences when found may be most accurately described as sex differences. Sex differences need not refer to properties of individuals, that is, they need not be essential differences (Deaux, 1993; Unger, 1990). Non-biological phenomena that correlate with sex are not necessarily caused by sex. A correlation between sex and nurturance, for example, does not necessarily implicate biology; nor does it locate nurturance in the individual.

As controversial as the location of gender is its nature as a concept. Gender has been described as an analytic category for making sense of the world as well as a social relation, defined practically by consequences of being assigned male or female (Flax, 1987). It has been called a scheme of social classification by which biological difference is transformed into social difference (Unger, 1990). It has been described as beliefs about men and women that can be assimilated by their self-systems (Deaux & Major, 1987; Sherif, 1982) and as a property of systems not people (Ferree & Hess, 1987). Yet the term has also been used for individual behaviors and social transactions that are commonly understood as gendered (Bohan, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and for processes of social construction by which behaviors

and transactions are gendered (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990; Unger, 1990). Thus feminist discourse regards gender as both noun and verb, to reflect social uses of biological cues which maintain cultural prescriptions (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In recognition that gender is more than a measurement of sex, psychologists have developed a variety of methods to assess gender. Yet, the complexity, ambiguity, and controversial relationship between sex and gender have made measurement difficult. Measurement efforts have most often involved self-ratings on qualities that correlate with sex while disregarding social and cultural contexts with which the qualities were correlated. Two widely used scales, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) and Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory, measure masculinity and femininity as if they were properties of individuals but include items that denote interactional and institutional levels as well. But even though these scales are not based on bipolar and unidimensional models, they still present contextless social behaviors and qualities that respondents use to characterize themselves, retaining the assumption that masculinity and femininity are properties of individuals which can be defined by personality-like characteristics.

Work to date gives little basis for confidence in current measurement tools for gender and little basis for knowing whether appearance and behavior are differentially important in inferences about others' or our own gender. Indeed, it may be

relevant to ask whether masculinity and femininity even have meaning in current cultural roles. Is it rather the case, as Spence and Sawin (1985) suggest, that concepts other than gender identity have little utility in people's daily lives? The research reported here was undertaken to move toward answers to these questions.

OUR RESEARCH

We conceptualize gender as both a property of systems (Ferree and Hess, 1987) and of people. We like the characterization of Kessler and McKenna (1978) of gender as having at least four facets: assignment, identity, role and attribution. In addition, we conceive gender as created in interactions between people and their environment (which includes other people). Since current conceptions of gender are built upon a foundation of two polarized entities, we operationalized genders as masculinity and femininity. We hypothesized that individuals have fluid perceptions of masculinity and femininity that change with circumstances, including the persons with whom they communicate.

Method

Because little previous research has addressed the range of characteristics attributed to gender or the circumstances in which gender characteristics are salient, we used open ended questions to elicit such information. We asked students to give up to eight characteristics of the most feminine and the most masculine person they knew and, if that person ever seems more or less feminine or more or less masculine, in what circumstances

the variations occur. We also asked about respondents' own feelings of femininity and masculinity, and about circumstances in which those feelings were enhanced. Finally, we asked students to rate themselves, using 7-point Likert scales anchored by 'not very true of me' and 'very true of me,' on 16 items from the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, 1974) which in previous studies have loaded consistently on masculine/instrumental and feminine/expressive dimensions (Ballard-Reisch & Elton, 1992): masculinity items (acts as leader, aggressive, assertive, dominant, has leadership ability, independent, masculine, and willing to take a stand); femininity items (affectionate, compassionate, eager to sooth hurt feelings, feminine, gentle, sensitive to needs of others, sympathetic and tender).

One hundred eighty-three undergraduates in communication and psychology courses (83 males, 100 females) from a Midatlantic, suburban university and a liberal arts college in a small Midwestern town participated. The university students were largely commuters; the college is residential. All respondents completed the questionnaire in groups of 20 to 40, but university students participated in the context of a class activity whereas college students participated after class in return for supplementary course credit. Respondents' median age was 19, which was higher in the university sample than in the college sample (median university age = 21, college = 19, median test chi square (1) = 46.47, $p < .001$). The average university respondent was a junior or senior, whereas the average college respondent was a first year undergraduate (chi square (3) = 69.54, $p < .001$).

The university sample was selected by reputation to represent a relatively conservative population and the college sample to represent a relatively liberal one. Students from the former population came from families with less education than did students from the latter. The median educational level of university students' fathers was the bachelor's degree, whereas the median level of college students' fathers was close to the doctorate (chi square (4) = 15.26, $p < .001$). These differences were reflected in students' estimates of parental social class. The median estimate by university students was middle class, whereas the median estimate by college students was upper middle class (chi square(3) = 9.98, $p < .019$). University and college students did not differ in ethnic diversity. In both schools, close to 75% indicated they were Caucasian, 12% Asian Pacific Islanders, 8% African American/Black, and 5% Latino/Hispanic, mixed, or other ethnicity. Although university males rated themselves higher on the BSRI masculine item than did college males (means = 5.96 and 4.88 respectively, $t=4.58$ $p < .001$), and university females rated themselves higher on the BSRI feminine item than did college females (means 5.54 and 4.63 respectively, $t = 3.90$, $p < .001$), the samples displayed few other differences in responses to questions about masculinity and femininity.

In the first analysis of these data, we developed categories to code qualities of gender and circumstances of gender variation from questionnaires of 50 respondents, 25 men and 25 women. We then coded all 183 questionnaires according to these categories and compared proportions whose responses were coded in each

category. The qualities linked to masculinity and femininity were grouped into five major categories: physical; cognitive; attitudes and interests; emotional and dispositional qualities; and a final group that combined interactional qualities and processes--such as flirting. The circumstances that influence the salience of gender were grouped into five categories: those emphasizing the presence of other people; types of social interaction; physical activities; efficacy and management activities; events.

We found that impressions and feelings of femininity and masculinity did, indeed, vary by context, and that the qualities and contexts associated with gender did not vary by class, school, age, ethnicity, sex, or sex-type (Beinstein Miller & Taylor, 1993). The coding procedure used in our first analysis placed both indicative and contraindicative qualities in the same category. For example, among physical qualities, strong and weak, large and small were both included in the category of body qualities. Similarly voice qualities included both deep voice and soft voice. Such combinations made sense since the goal of that effort was to identify general dimensions of gender for measurement beyond respondent sex and psychological characteristics. However, this procedure resulted in coding stereotypically feminine and masculine qualities into the same category. And it told us little about the ideas students had in mind when they described a person as appearing masculine or feminine. For that reason, we undertook further analysis

examining the verbal content of the responses, which we summarize in this paper.

First, we looked closely at the "up to eight" descriptions given when respondents described the most masculine and feminine persons they know (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, April, 1994). Next, we examined the circumstances cited by respondents when identifying situations in which these persons seem more or less masculine and in which they indicated they themselves felt masculine and feminine (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, July, 1994). Finally, we perform additional analysis of the connotations of the descriptions and discuss in this paper how results from these three different analyses complement each other.

Conceptions of masculinity and femininity

Altogether, 1,033 descriptors of characteristics for masculine persons were listed, and 961 for the feminine persons. Many were repeated, only 588 different terms described masculine characteristics, 574 described feminine. The proportion of descriptors for masculine persons and the proportion for feminine were nearly equal in each general category used in the 1993 paper: physical, cognitive, attitudinal, international and dispositional qualities. Physical characteristics most often marked both masculine and feminine persons. Of the total words applied to masculine and feminine persons, 402 (39%) and 384 (40%) respectively related to physical characteristics. Of these, 179 different terms described masculinity compared to 256 for femininity.

Physical characteristics named.

Although the total times physical characteristics were named was similar for feminine and masculine persons, specific descriptors chosen differ considerably. Respondents cited vocal characteristics as identifiers of masculinity more than for femininity, and the number of masculine identifiers related to strength and body build far exceeds feminine ones. Masculine is frequently identified as strong (using only 9 different words in 82 citations), compared to feminine, which is predominantly weak, delicate, frail, fragile, and soft (25 citations, using 14 different words). At the same time, notably, femininity did receive 9 citations of strong. Similarly, muscles identify masculine (48 times), but never feminine. Size identifies both: masculine (60 mentions) is big, large or has some body part being big or broad (big hands or chest, broad shoulders, face or chest); feminine (49) is small, petite, thin, trim, slender or skinny or has small or thin body parts. Items in the general category of "body-build" included a wider variety of descriptors for femininity (physical attributes or build, physique, figure, good figure, curves, shape or shapely, attractive figure and veluptuality [sic] than for masculinity (build, physical build, body definition, defined, well built).

Most descriptions of physical characteristics involve such differences: similar amounts of mentions within a category but different substance for masculine and feminine and more different terms used to describe feminine. For example, hair is curly, long, blond or styled when identifying a feminine person; it is short, or body or facial hair when identifying masculinity.

Some things, however, do identify femininity and not masculinity. Smell and make-up were cited 20 times for feminine, rarely for masculine. Dress is overwhelmingly named for femininity, as is being attractive or good looking or being concerned with appearance. Feminine dress is nice, pretty, cute, "dressed up," involves skirts, frills or lace. Masculine dress is less specific. Overall appearance citations also distinguish the groups, appearing less often in masculine references. For femininity, looks not including dress, (cute, good looking, beauty, beautiful, pretty, attractive) were mentioned often.

Characteristics other than physical ones

Among the items identified as attitudinal, cognitive, dispositional, or interactional, our first analysis (Beinstein Miller & Taylor, 1993) showed that dispositional qualities were mentioned second most often, and equally for masculinity and femininity. Two significant differences were found: Attitudinal qualities were mentioned by more respondents for masculine than for feminine persons, and interpersonal qualities more often for feminine than for masculine. Attitudinal differences occurred largely because we categorized the responses athletic, athleticism, or "physical" along with "likes sports," "plays soccer," "watches/participates in sports," etc., as attitudes. Otherwise, the numbers of interests/attitudes for femininity and masculinity were similar.

In looking closely at the content of these references, we could differentiate targets of negative attitudes from targets of positive ones. Only for feminine persons were negative attitudes

cited--"fear of insects," "very frightened of things," "dislikes outdoors," "does not like violence," "won't touch dirt," etc. Otherwise, the number of descriptors for masculine and feminine in a category varied little, though their content did. Attitudes other than sports cited for masculine concerned a job, or interest in cars, outdoors activities and sexuality. Attitude targets for feminine tended to be domestic.

Among the cognitive qualities, intelligence identified femininity and masculinity equally often, as did being not intelligent or ignorant. Femininity was associated with being intuitive or perceptive slightly more than was masculinity and being logical, a problem solver, decisive, or authoritative related somewhat more to masculinity, suggesting residual existence of stereotypical associations. However, these few indicators were not strongly indicative of masculinity for these young people.

Other cognitive qualities, however, demonstrated closer associations with masculinity or femininity. We found a strong association of being strong-willed, opinionated or determined with masculinity and an equally strong, though not exclusive, association of being sensitive or understanding with femininity. Further analysis of connotations for sensitivity, however, qualifies that conclusion somewhat, since at least some of the uses of sensitivity may connote overly emotional responding rather than understanding. Connotations of emotionality would strengthen evidence for the differences we found within the category of dispositional qualities.

Among the dispositional qualities, we found some remarkable variations. Masculinity was never associated with the word emotional, except in the sense of not being emotional, controlling or hiding emotions, being closed off, not very spontaneous, keeping feelings in, being stoic or not crying, described in many different ways. In contrast, the word emotional itself often described the feminine person. Another group of words, which might be categorized as interactional, may relate here as well, and they demonstrate similar contrasts. Being expressive, either of thoughts or (mostly) feelings mostly characterized the feminine person. Similarly, being quiet, contemplative, reserved, not wordy, silent or the "silent type" characterized the masculine person. The feminine person was described as reserved or quiet a few times, but also as being shy, demure, timid, modest or insecure, terms never applied to the masculine person. And the masculine person was described as assertive or straightforward more often than the feminine person, who was also call chatty or verbal, terms never applied to masculine persons.

The strongest overall association with femininity comes from a collection of references to being supportive, loving, kind, nice, concerned, giving, caring or compassionate, maternal or nurturing. In combination with the high concentration of perceptiveness and emotionality descriptors for the feminine person, these responses strongly indicate that talking and behaving in ways to heighten perceptions of interpersonal concern and feeling are central to feminine gender.

Another set of responses suggests the traditional association of masculinity with being in charge remains strong. Masculine persons were described as having leadership, authority and command, being decisive, having power or being powerful, being a problem solver or in other ways competent, being demanding or a discipliner. Only once was any of those terms applied to the feminine person. Related perceptions showed similar though not quite as lopsided imbalances: being competitive, independent, ambitious and hardworking, bold or brave and confident. Combined, these responses provide clear evidence that masculinity relates to being effective in controlling the social and physical environments.

Descriptions with Negative Connotations

Cued by one young woman's comment about masculine, "I never use this word; I only use it in a derogatory sense," we began to sense that many of the respondents intended to convey negative evaluations in some of their descriptions. Moreover, we found word groupings that suggested femininity was seen as being nicer and more pleasant than masculinity--a finding reflected in the distribution of references to loving, kind or nice, and of the words gracious, gentlemanly, polite or charming, all predominantly for the feminine person. In contrast, aggressiveness and being prone to fighting or having a temper more often associated with masculinity. If these impressions were accurate, it would demonstrate that masculinity was seen more negatively than was femininity.

We, therefore, conducted an additional analysis. Identifying 305 words or terms that might have negative connotations, we conducted a preliminary study in which students identified words they though had negative implications. One hundred fifty-two descriptors were cited as negative by more than half the raters. These 152 descriptors were then divided into two lists and administered to a new sample of respondents (58 from each school were randomly assigned to evaluated one or the other of the lists). Respondents indicated whether each word would be considered negative if they heard it applied to a person. They chose one of four response options for each word: (1) negative whenever it was used (i.e., applied to any person, regardless of gender) (2) negative if it were used for a masculine person or (3) negative if applied to a feminine person or (4) negative for no one.

Chi square goodness-of-fit tests were used to determine whether responses to each word departed significantly from an equal distribution and whether each was considered negative more often for masculine or for feminine persons. Additionally, the total number of descriptors that respondents cited as negative for masculine persons only and for feminine persons only was tallied to make quantitative comparisons of negative associations with masculinity and femininity. Similar totals were computed for descriptors that respondents evaluated as negative for both masculine and feminine persons and as negative for neither. In addition, we considered it important if over 65% of the respondents considered a word to be negative. Sixty-six words

met this criterion when the reference applied to anyone regardless of gender. Only one of these words (stubborn) was used often in our original study (10 times). Altogether, these negative descriptions had been applied to the masculine persons 83 times, to feminine persons 9 times.

The analysis showed that of all 152 words, 31 were considered more negative for masculine persons than for feminine.

Among these were four (beer belly, cocky attitude, violent temper and arrogant) that met the 65% criterion if applied to any person; each had been a description of a masculine person. One descriptor (feminine voice) met the criterion if applied to masculine persons only; nine were considered negative for masculine persons only by half the sample. Most of the eight descriptions that evoke stereotypically female or feminine characteristics (feminine voice, high-pitched or extremely high-pitched voice, tiny, dainty, delicate, very fragile and weak) relate to physical characteristics and were all originally descriptions of a feminine person. The remaining descriptions, many of which evoke masculine stereotypes, had originally been given for a masculine person.

19 descriptors were considered more negative for feminine persons than for masculine. Four were rated as negative by 65% of respondents regardless of gender (bossy, heavy, sleeps around and nit-picky); two of these (bossy and nit-picky) had originally been given as descriptions of a feminine person. Half the sample considered only one term (manly voice)

negative for feminine persons only; six of the terms had originally described a feminine person. Thus, however these data are analyzed, they support our inference that masculinity was seen as more negative than femininity.

Recognition of variability

In responding to the questions, "in what situations does this [other] person seem most masculine," and "in what situations does this [other] person seem most feminine," 85 percent of the respondents indicated that the masculine or the feminine person sometimes seemed less so.[1] Respondents mentioned somewhat fewer circumstances that influenced their own sense of masculinity and femininity than influenced perceptions of others (695 for others; 604 for themselves), but even then those who identified such situations considerably exceeded those who did not answer or said that situations did not have an influence. Twenty percent of respondents provided no circumstances in which they felt masculine and 26% provided none in which they felt feminine, but only 9% provided no circumstances for either. Not surprisingly, 72% of those who never felt masculine were female and 84% who never felt feminine were male.

Situations that enhance or diminish masculinity and femininity

Several situations and activities stand out among those that enhance or diminish perceptions or feelings of masculinity and femininity: situations involving other people; doing or watching sports; grooming, dressing up and dating; work or labor; and dealing with emotions. (See Tables)

Respondents cited a large number and variety of situations involving other people that influenced perceptions or feelings of femininity or masculinity. Commonly named were social situations; social gatherings; being with or hanging out with friends; being around family or at home; being with a boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse; being around people the person doesn't know well; being with men or women. Generally, these situations appeared to enhance or diminish masculinity or femininity equally.[2] Two relatively specific situations emerge with clarity. One of these is that, for women, femininity is evoked when they "go on dates." Dating was rarely cited as femininity enhancing for others and never cited by men as enhancing their own femininity or masculinity. A few references were made to "being at parties" as situations that enhanced femininity in others, but the word "date" was used only by women to specify when they themselves feel more feminine.

We believe citing the specific dating situation relates to its connection with physical appearance. Women often cited dress / grooming as enhancing their own feelings both of femininity and masculinity. Of all items women listed as enhancing femininity, more than a fourth (28%) related to dress or grooming and 9 % of the items they named as enhancing feelings of masculinity related to dress or grooming. To conclude that femininity is to a large extent something one "puts on" would not be an exaggeration. Dress and grooming items included wearing (or not) dresses, skirts, makeup, high heels and having one's hair "done." Many women simply described "being dressed up." Men cited no dress or

grooming related items as enhancing masculinity and two cited wearing cologne and being "dressed up" as times when they felt feminine.

The other relatively specific situation in which strong consensus emerged: Sports and fitness activities increase perceptions or feelings of masculinity. Respondents cited 44 sports related activities as masculinity-enhancing others and 99 such items as increasing their own masculinity. Some references were general--for example, playing sports, working out and physical exercise--but others were specific--lifting weights, playing soccer, football or basketball.

Two other groups of activities/situations were named less often but are worth mentioning because of their unequal applications to masculinity and femininity. A general set of work-related activities and physical labors enhance masculinity and diminish femininity, when others were described. Such items included shoveling snow, working outdoors, leading at work, repairing--especially cars--or building things, working in the dirt, or just generally being "at work." When describing themselves, respondents also identified these things as masculinity enhancing. We considered cooking, sewing and decorating as work-related, so work activities can enhance femininity as well, depending on the nature of the work.

In our analysis of personal characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, April, 1994), anger and aggressiveness were linked with masculinity, while feelings or qualities of sadness, fear, caring, and more

general emotionality and sensitivity were linked with femininity. In this analysis of situations, we found the manner of dealing with feelings related to gender. For example, aggressive or assertive behavior and talk as well as expressions of anger were associated strongly with masculinity. Descriptions of when the other person seemed more masculine included fistfights, shooting, being a solder, being aggressive, or in an angry scene. Typical descriptions of when the respondents themselves felt masculine included when angry, physically violent actions, yelling, and in a fight. In contrast, being sad or hurt or sick; crying; complaining; expressing vulnerability; seeking forgiveness; and having low confidence all diminish masculinity and sometimes enhance femininity, as illustrated by the young man quoted at the outset of this paper. It seems clear that having emotion is less critical a component influencing perceptions of gender than what emotions are being expressed and whether or how they are expressed.

Striking here are the contexts that polarize masculinity and femininity. Sports and fitness activities seem to enhance masculinity without affecting perceptions of femininity. Similarly dressing, grooming, and dating were never named as diminishing masculinity. In contrast, work-related activities, most often cited as "at work," diminished perceptions of others' femininity while more specific references to work or labor increased masculinity. And as just noted, emotionality has complex effects in both increasing and decreasing perceptions and feelings of femininity and masculinity. To be angry or to engage

in anger associated behavior (fighting, arguing, confronting) enhances masculinity and reduces femininity. To cry, to be sad or generally "emotional," and to talk about "feelings" reduce masculinity and (though to a smaller degree) increase femininity.

Discussion

We started this research seeking to find whether specific characteristics or situations could be linked to gender variability. The data collected show that, for the population from which these students come, they can. We need to emphasize that results should not be overgeneralized since whatever is true of this fairly limited population--relatively affluent, relatively young college students--may not be true of other populations. These data demonstrate that at least these young people recognize gender as mutable. Most respondents easily understood masculinity and femininity as something that increases and decreases and identified situations in which the changes occur.

Prior research shows that physical appearance and manner are important characteristics of femininity and masculinity (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Myers & Gonda, 1982; Spence & Sawin, 1985). Our finding a high correlation between the BSRI scale items masculine and feminine and respondent sex (Beinstein Miller & Taylor, 1993) and that 40 percent of the descriptions of the most feminine or masculine person were descriptions about the body (Taylor & Beinstein Miller, April 1994) support previous findings. These results are buttressed by the analysis of negative words, which showed violation of physical expectations for one's sex to be

among the most sanctioned descriptions. We therefore anticipated that context effects on perceptions of gender would be those related primarily to physical appearance.

Yet, relatively few of the situations cited related to physicality. Among the references to appearance, almost none relate to the body itself, but rather to how one dresses and grooms or what one does with the body (doing sports or work, exercise, etc.). Overall, students made relatively few references to a person's sex, and when sex was mentioned as a situation influencing gender variability, it was most often in statements about "having sex," rarely about "being" a sex. Therefore, while these respondents do reflect what Kessler and McKenna (1978) describe as an incorrigible link between sex and gender, the link is not absolute.

The lack of physical references among the situations that enhance or diminish gender may show that respondents make distinctions among at least some of the four facets of gender Kessler and McKenna (1978) describe (assignment, identity, role and attribution). Our respondents' descriptions of characteristics could be classified in two broad categories: relatively stable (physical) and relatively changeable (behavior) qualities. These two groups may correspond with Kessler and McKenna's categories. Respondents may see gender identity as fixed and related to one's sex and, hence, physical characteristics, while they recognize gender roles and attributions as more variable and related to behavior. When

their perceptions of gender change, therefore, it is because of their attitudes and feelings toward what is done and said.

The joint influence of sex identification and gender role and attribution may show up most clearly in the relationships between femininity and dressing/grooming. Whether personal qualities or contexts of femininity were being described women respondents especially saw being dressed up or specific kinds of clothes as major factors. For most of these young people what one wears is probably not a matter of gender identity, but they do see femininity relating closely to roles and imagined attributions by others. Thus, femininity increases when a woman adheres to cultural expectations for feminine appearance.

Similar associations between dress and masculinity did not appear for men. One explanation may be that the culture of these young people now holds less rigid prescriptions for femininity than for masculinity. A range of behaviors must be allowable in order to find context effects. Therefore, respondents don't mention context effects from dress because the masculine persons they were describing wear only clothing culturally identified with masculine. Were they not to do so the negative sanctions are severe. Only occasionally now would women receive cultural sanctions for not wearing skirts, high heels and makeup, elements of dress with the strongest the ties to femininity. And in circumstances such as dating or parties, the dress aspect of femininity is salient, and women "put on" the appropriate role manifestations. No such variety in masculine role behavior yet exists.

That more different physical qualities were named for feminine persons (256) than for masculine (179) supports such analysis of role rigidity. Near consensus on three physical characteristics of masculine persons accounts for the difference. Strong was mentioned by 52 respondents, muscular by 22, and deep voice by 18. No such agreement existed on any single word for physical characteristics of the feminine person. The highest agreement was 16 respondents saying the feminine person was pretty.

These young people associate masculinity with the body as much as they do femininity. If it ever was true that expectations were greater for women's bodies than for men's, that may no longer be the case. Instead, as this strong agreement on body characteristics and the analysis of negative terms suggest, NOT being big, strong and muscular or not having an "appropriately masculine" voice may penalize men just as disinterest in dress, appearance or acquiring beauty may penalize women. These data suggest that men could be at greater risk for disapproval than could women, at least in young adulthood.

Since we theorize gender to be created in interaction among people, we expected interactions with others to be prominent among those enhancing or diminishing gender. That expectation was supported. Being with, being around or doing things with other people comprised highest number of situations named. Within this amorphous category only a few associations between specific situations and gender emerge. Leading, controlling or being in charge appeared with some frequency as masculinity

enhancing. Nurturing and helping behavior related to both masculinity and femininity, though somewhat more strongly to the latter, especially when the students described their own feelings. Beyond these associations, we can conclude that, overall, interaction with others appears to both increase or decrease the salience of gender displays. Few specific interaction situations have a predictable impact.

We noted the exceptions: the femininity-enhancing nature of dates and parties, the masculinity-enhancing effects of sports. Given the high association between parties and "dressing up," we believe that parties relate to femininity because of clothes, make-up and grooming as much as because of the interactions that take place. That many of the contexts of enhanced gender (both femininity and masculinity) were "social situations," makes reasonable the conclusion that the interactive nature of such situations for these young people makes gender displays, through dress and other means, highly salient.

The data in this study suggest that young adults' beliefs maintain many other traditional expectations of men and women, as shown for example, in the strong relationship of sports with masculinity. Being "expressive," especially of feelings, associates with and enhances femininity while being argumentative, assertive, straightforward, loud, decisive associate with and enhance masculinity. The strongest association of femininity next to physical characteristics is with emotionality and expressions of emotion, while masculine persons were said not to display emotions or to suppress them.

Yet, anger in a variety of forms was associated with masculine persons. The descriptions of situations show that expressing anger enhances masculinity until one loses control or is otherwise humiliated, at which point masculinity is diminished. Anger strongly diminishes femininity but being sensitive, understanding and caring enhance it. Since feminine persons were seen as emotional, and emotional situations diminished masculinity, these young people apparently have not construed anger as an emotional expression. They may associate emotional expression with more passive or submissive displays such as love, sadness or fear. Displays of anger tend to be dominant or controlling. Respondents may have viewed emotion and its expression as a sign of vulnerability, on which would violate traditional expectations of masculinity. Nonethless, whatever motivates the students' word choices, the data here reinforce arguments that dealing with emotions is an area in which the gender constructions of our culture place strong burdens on people.

Also striking is how analysis of negative words reinforces relationships of gender with size, strength and muscles and gender. Not only are masculine persons expected to be big, strong and muscular, they apparently will be negatively evaluated for being small, weak, fragile, or having "feminine" vocal characteristics that might suggest such weakness. But what a fine line one needs to walk when 71 % of respondents will think it a negative description if a masculine person is called "heavy" and 53 % would think it negative were this person only "a little"

overweight! The feminine person appears to face similar constraints. Unlike the descriptions of actual feminine persons given by the respondents, these assessments demonstrate how much negative evaluation for femininity is placed on size. While to be small or tiny seems acceptable or even desirable, nearly 60% will evaluate a feminine person negatively if s/he is weak. Moreover, 81 % of evaluators consider it negative for a feminine person to be even "a little" overweight, 75 % think it negative to be chunky, 73% negatively assess being physically large, and 59% don't like a feminine person to be stockily built.

Several overall conclusions emerge from analysis of negative connotations associated with the descriptions given. More descriptions shown to be negative were of masculine persons, suggesting that masculinity, as currently defined, is negatively evaluated. At the same time, and even though stereotypes for both remain quite strong, more people will negatively evaluate violations of expectations for masculinity than they will violations of expectations for femininity. Associations between size and gender are strong with quite negative evaluations being assessed against those seen not to fit within a fairly narrow ideal range. Thus, while these assessments tell us little about the words' connotations for respondents in our original survey, they support the inference that violations of masculine stereotypes are quite strongly sanctioned. Feminine persons were also described by negative terms, though much less often than masculine persons, and the negative word analysis shows that

feminine persons will also be evaluated negatively for displaying some stereotypically masculine qualities.

Clearly, understanding how gender actually operates in human interaction requires a more complex analysis than has occurred to date. The data in this study show that, even though (too) many of the traditional expectations for femininity and masculinity remain, young people today can with relative ease disconnect gender from biology. Although strong ties exist among physicality and masculinity and femininity, a larger number connect behaviors (including talk) and attitudes toward gender. We undertook this study because we wanted to contribute to the ongoing debate about how scholars should conceptualize gender. We complete the analysis even more convinced of the need to tap the multifaceted nature of gender, to no longer be satisfied with a "simple" identification of respondent sex, and to stop describing sex-linked differences when found as gender-linked differences. These data strongly support the argument that gender is both something people "do" and "are" and that systems both "have" and "create" gender. Moreover, the data make clear that "ordinary" language users as well as scholars conceive of gender as complex and variable. Hence, any measurement scheme which captures only part of the gender construct will at best contribute only partial knowledge and at worst contribute to the belief that we know what we do not.

Endnotes

[1] This figure is conservative, it is a percentage of all respondents, not just those answered this question. Only 10 respondents (5.5%) recorded no circumstances in which the masculine person seemed less masculine and 18 (10%) said the feminine person never seemed less feminine.

[2] The exceptions are that such references were cited somewhat less frequently as diminishing femininity when the respondent was describing another person and somewhat more frequently as enhancing femininity.

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Table

Situations that Enhance or Decrease Masculinity and Femininity (others)

Situation	+feminine.	- fem.	+masc.	- masc.
Being with/around others				
Being w/ Doing Thgs	68	32	54	60
Compared To				
Control/lead			12	
Can't contr/lead/dom.				11
Nurture/help	15		7	
General Situations				
Dates/parties	3			
competitive/pressure		6	15	2
other	18	4	11	2
Sports/Fitness	7	8	44	
Work/labor	8	17	18	5
academics		8		7
Appearance				
Dress/Grooming	7			
Behavior/mvmt			6	
Sex/sexuality/ sensuality	3			
Emotion				
anger/fighting		27	14	
being "emotional"	4		5	
crying/sad				20
fear/embarassed				
Kinds/types of talk				
angry/confrontive		7	6	14
emotional		2		
flirting	5			
other	15	9	12	8
Being Caring/sensitive				
Other	22	22	16	23
alone/thinking		7		5
TOTAL	175	149	220	152

Table

Situations that Enhance or Decrease Masculinity and Femininity (self)

Situation	+ femininity Women	Men	Total	+ masculinity Women	Men	Total
Being with/around others						
Being w/ Doing Thgs	29	8	37	9	20	29
Compared To				6		6
Control/lead				13	10	23
Nurture/help	22	6	28			
General Situations						
Dates/parties	18		18			
Other	11	7	18	4		4
Sports/Fitness	5	3	8	45	54	99
Work/labor	12		12	13	18	31
Appearance						
Dress/Grooming	57	2	59	13		13
Behavior/mvmt				9		9
Sex/sexuality/ sensuality	7	3	10	14		14
Emotion						
anger				8	9	17
being "emotional"						
crying	7	1	8			
fear/embarassed		4	4			
Kinds/types of talk						
angry/confrontive				10	11	21
emotional		6	6			
flirting	9		9			
other	5	5	10			
Being Caring/sensitive	3	7	10			
Other	20	10	30	24	39	63
alone/thinking		8	8			
TOTAL	205	70	275	150	179	329

Appendix

Definitions of the categories in tables 6 & 7 and typical examples

Being with or Around Others includes four subgroups of responses.

Being With & Doing Things with someone else

Many are general: around women, with close friends, with close male friends, around a group of men, with a mixed group, with other guys, hanging out with friends, clowning with friends

Others are specific: with her daughters, when you talk to her, with my girlfriend, with my mother, when I'm speaking to a female of interest, with my father, with my 5 brothers

Being with [perhaps contrasting] others, suggests comparison:
When I'm around jocks, among several large, big men, around women who seem especially feminine, around small "fragile" women,

Controlling or leading others/ being controlled or led:
taking a dominant role in sex, making decisions as head of household, when I have to make decisions for others, times of leadership, when in charge,

[Or, Conversely] Cant' control or lead or dominate:
breaking up with boyfriend or girlfriend, when complaining, when wrong, when being yelled at by sister, when confidence is low, need help from others

Nurturing or helping - or being helped/nurtured
having a woman teach me, teaching children, dealing with women I sacrifice for us, dealing with children, taking care of children, taking care of someone who is sick, when offering help, counseling others,

General situations (no participating others named)

Dates/parties: going to a party, preparing to "go out," going out, going on dates, on a date, before a date

Involves Competition or Pressure: under pressure, in times of stress, competitive environment, during a crisis, emergency situations, confronted with a problem

Other:
at home, in church, around the house, in public, relaxing at home, during meals, eating

Sports/fitness:
working out, during sports, playing sports, playing basketball, playing golf, playing tennis, playing football, skiing, watching sports, sports, lifting weights, doing athletics

Work/labor:
General: at work, doing labor, fixing the car, working at office, physical work, working outdoors, doing high technical work, being a leader atr work, dealing with customers, cooking, cleaning, decorating
Academics: in class, in her studies, in the laboratory, in the classroom, in academic setting, when working on school work

Appearance:
Dress/Grooming
when I wear perfume, wearing make-up, having my hair done, trying on nice clothes, when I dress up, dressing up to go out, wearing high heels, wearing party clothes, wearing a dress, when I wear cologne, when she's fixed up, wearing jeans, wearing a flannel shirt, wearing my motorcycle boots, if I'm not dressed up
Behavior Movement: dancing,

Sex/sexuality/sensuality
when we are in bed, having sex, giving a woman a backrub, during sex, when I have my period, experiencing my sexuality

Emotion
Anger/fighting: when angry, when mad, when loses temper, agitated or angry, tired or irritable, in a fight, angry scene, confrontations with other men, conflicts that involve families and business, having someone else scared of me

Being emotional: emotional situations, dealing with emotion, in times of stress needs to be held, death situations, watching "emotional" movies/plays,
Crying/sad: when he is sad, crying, showing vulnerabilities, having emotional problems

Fear/embarrassed: when I fear things, when being verbally chastised, when I need help, when I'm not sure about what is going on.

Kinds and Types of Talk (Category similar to expressing emotions, but description involves reference to talk about the feelings
Angry/confrontative: arguments, disagreements, in heated discussions; fight w/ words, asserting herself, when she throws a fit, shouting, yelling, when challenged, sticking up for others, in an intellectual debate, when I stand up for myself (esp. to a male), arguing/fighting for a point, pushing my views on others
Emotional: listening to people's problems, having to show emotions, communicating to improve relationship, being honest, being intimate and telling about myself
Flirting (usually respondents simply used a variation on this word)

Being Caring / sensitive: concerned about others' feelings, sensitive to others, caring about my girlfriend, when I care about others and sympathize with friends, be more compassionate, gentle and understanding